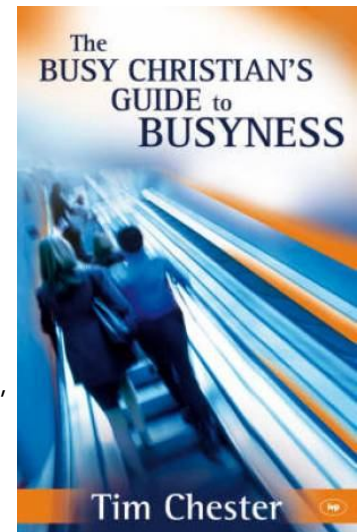


the busy christian's guide to busyness

Tim Chester (IVP, 2006, new ed 2008)

If I were inclined to make new-year resolutions, one would be that I would stop responding 'I'm very busy' when people ask me how I am. In his conclusion to this book Chester reminds us that Christians *should* be busy: we give our life to Christ and no longer claim that our time is our own. But we are not meant to be *over-busy*. And it's over-busyness and how to avoid it that is the subject of this book.

For many leaders, whether in the 'market place' or in ministry, over-busyness is one of our greatest problems. To help, Chester offers first an analysis of what makes us so busy, and then six lies that make us over-busy, giving a chapter to each: 'I'm busy because...I need to prove myself, of other people's expectations, otherwise things get out of control, I prefer being under pressure, I need the money, I want to make the most of life.'



Chester's main challenge to his readers is to identify which of these lies drives us and then to deal radically with it. The six key chapters each explore an antidote to a lie: a truth about God: 'the liberating rest of God; the liberating fear of God' and so on. They give spiritual input on the problem, reflections on some key psalms to help us to correct faulty thinking, and much practical wisdom. Practical insights include Covey's time management matrix (urgent/important), Paul Tripp's concept of the circle of responsibility and the circle of concern (the former being things we can influence and the latter we can't – but often think we can or confuse the circles) and Pareto's Principle (the 80:20 rule) and its application – for example, after a certain number of hours, continuing to polish one's sermon may not make it significantly better.

I commend this as a well-written and engaging book, which sees perceptively through some of the idols of our culture. There are good and varied examples both of what 'busyness' looks like in real people's lives, and how some have found ways of countering it and living differently.

'I need the money' may not be a motivation for clergy and Christian workers, but I liked Chester's reminder that church should be a counter-cultural community that helps Christians to disengage from the lies of our materialistic culture, rather than conforming to it. I was glad of a reminder from an obviously busy Christian leader (does he put this into practice?) that we could work less and give more time to what matters: relationships, friendships, purpose, service and God. I liked the discussion of 'deadline junkies' (people who say they are motivated by deadlines and like to be last-minute) and how they make others suffer.

A few quibbles: I was surprised that the author uses a non-inclusive Bible, which in places jarred with me: 'from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts..'; 'if a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit'; 'you return man to dust'... Chester sounds quite egalitarian in his involvement in household chores and childcare, and in giving examples of men and women, but in discussing 'perseverance' he cites 1 Timothy 2:15, 'women will be saved through childbearing', accepting the NLT gloss 'by accepting their role as mothers', and while he stresses that not every Christian woman will be a mother, he comes close to contrasting being a faithful mother with Timothy's role of being a faithful teacher (a role for men?).

And finally, two of many quotable quotes: 'God does not expect me to do more than I can do'. 'Rest is the behaviour of someone who looks to God to provide.'

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